

1-24-2018

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## Recommended Citation

Navarro, Carlos. "Mexico's Interior Secretary Osorio Chong Resigns to Seek Senate Seat." (2018).  
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/6405>

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## Mexico's Interior Secretary Osorio Chong Resigns to Seek Senate Seat

by Carlos Navarro

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2018-01-24

Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong resigned from the post of interior secretary to seek a seat as senator for the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in Mexico's July 1 election. The head of the interior ministry (Secretaría de Gobernación, SEGOB), a post Osorio Chong held for the past five years, is generally considered the second most powerful post in Mexico, after the presidency.

The timing of Osorio's Chong departure was somewhat unexpected, but the decision was not surprising. The interior secretary had made no secret of his desire to represent the PRI in July's presidential race. The governing party, however, decided to anoint former finance secretary José Antonio Meade, a candidate who is perceived to be free of corruption ([SourceMex, Dec. 6, 2017](#)). With Meade at the helm, the PRI hopes to counter its reputation as a party composed of corrupt politicians ([SourceMex, Dec. 3, 2014](#), [April 29, 2015](#), [July 19, 2017](#)).

Critics point out that Osorio Chong looked the other way while acts of corruption in PRI-governed states occurred under his watch, including high-profile cases involving Javier Duarte de Ochoa of Veracruz, Roberto Borge of Quintana Roo, César Duarte Jáquez of Chihuahua, Rodrigo Medina de la Cruz of Nuevo León, and Roberto Sandoval Castañeda of Nayarit.

"There was not even an attempt to stop the irregularities occurring in the states," columnist Alfonso Zárate wrote in the daily newspaper *El Universal*. "SEGOB—which has significant legal and political resources to encourage the governors to carry out their jobs with rectitude and efficiency—tolerated, and perhaps protected, these individuals."

Osorio Chong also failed to reduce violence and address impunity in Mexico during his tenure at SEGOB ([SourceMex, Jan. 14, 2015](#), [Feb. 18, 2015](#), [May 11, 2016](#)).

"The interior secretary leaves his post with the country facing the highest level of violence in its history," columnist Raymundo Riva Palacio wrote in the daily business newspaper *El Financiero*. "His arguments that the problem is the result of deficiencies in the crime-fighting strategies of state and municipal governments tend to conceal some truths. For example, the plans to seek accountability for state and municipal police were postponed twice at the request of SEGOB; and the federal police force of 35,000 was kept at that level even though the budget for this purpose was increased by 300%."

### *Snubbed by the party*

Still, for most of 2017, Osorio Chong and Foreign Relations Secretary Luis Videgaray were the two names most prominently mentioned as potential standard-bearers for the PRI in the 2018 presidential race.

"From the start of this administration, they became the two strongest men in President Enrique Peña Nieto's government, and therefore, had the greatest possibility of succeeding him," columnist Leo Zuckermann wrote in the daily newspaper *Excélsior*.

According to Zuckermann, the two men engaged in a behind-the-scenes power struggle but ultimately were forced to cooperate. "Even though they did not like each other, they had to work together because they were part of the same administration," he wrote. "They had incentives to remain in the good graces of the president, who would in the end decide who would be the PRI candidate."

Videgaray was actually not part of the Cabinet for four months. He was forced to leave his post as finance secretary in September 2016 because of revelations that he was behind the decision to invite a highly unpopular Donald Trump to Mexico to meet with Peña Nieto during the height of the US presidential campaign ([SourceMex, Sept. 14, 2016](#)).

Ironically, Peña Nieto brought back Videgaray as foreign relations secretary at the beginning of 2017 to help build a bridge between the Mexican government and President-elect Trump ([SourceMex, Jan. 4, 2017](#)).

In the end, neither Osorio nor Videgaray got the nod from the PRI, which decided that Meade was the best option to counter the increasingly popular center-left candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, widely considered by many Mexicans as the best choice to stand up to Trump ([SourceMex, Feb. 22, 2017](#)).

The move to place Osorio at the top of the list of candidates of at-large positions in the Senate was the result of a behind-the-scenes negotiation designed to appease the interior secretary after the PRI decided to pick Meade.

"The resignation of Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong ... was the culmination of a difficult negotiation," columnist Roberto Rock wrote in *El Universal*. "Mr. Osorio, according to available information, succeeded in persuading the party hierarchy to place him at the top of the list of PRI candidates for at-large seats in the Senate."

At-large seats are allocated to each party based on the percentage of the national vote the parties receive on election day.

## *Cabinet changes*

The fallout from Osorio's resignation was a reshuffling of Peña Nieto's Cabinet. Alfonso Navarrete Prida, who had led the labor ministry (Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social, STPS), was the president's choice to serve out the last 11 months of his administration as head of SEGOB.

Navarrete Prida's tenure at the STPS was unremarkable. A career bureaucrat and politician, he previously served as member of the Chamber of Deputies and as a deputy attorney general in México state under former Governor Arturo Montiel and under then-Governor Peña Nieto himself.

Some analysts pointed out that Navarrete Prida is part of the faction of the PRI known as Grupo Atlacomulco, which has governed México state for generations ([SourceMex, March 22, 2017](#)).

"The departure of Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong and his team open up a space that can be interpreted as the 'takeover of SEGOB' by the Atlacomulco group, which is very close and loyal to Enrique Peña Nieto," columnist Alan Santacruz Farfán wrote in the daily newspaper *La Jornada Aguascalientes*.

Loyalty to the president is important because it minimizes divisions within the PRI ahead of the presidential election. Navarrete Prida's arrival to SEGOB "ensures that the president will have an

aide who is efficient and clearly loyal to the project offered by Peña and Meade," columnist Enrique Quintana wrote in the daily business newspaper El Financiero.

On the day that Osorio Chong tendered his resignation, Peña Nieto issued a statement thanking him for his service. Then the president offered a list of tasks for SEGOB under Navarrete Prida's leadership.

"The priorities that I have requested from the new interior secretary in the coming months include a strengthening of democratic governance throughout the country, based on shared responsibility among the three branches of the federal government as well as the federal, state, and local governments," said Peña Nieto. "We also seek to double down on efforts to fight crime, placing an emphasis on municipalities with the highest crime rates."

A third goal, said Peña Nieto, is to safeguard human rights. According to Quintana, one area to watch in this regard is how the federal investigative agency (Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional, CISEN) operates under its newly appointed director, Alberto Bazbaz. The agency was previously run by Eugenio Imaz, who was close to Osorio Chong.

The changes at SEGOB include the departure of Roberto Campa Cifrián, deputy secretary for human rights, who was appointed to replace Navarrete Prida as labor secretary. Campa Cifrián, a long-time member of the PRI, defected to the Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL) to run for the presidency in the 2006 election.

Peña Nieto also appointed a new head for the social development ministry (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, SEDESOL). Eviel Pérez Magaña, who previously served as deputy secretary at SEDESOL, was elevated to the post of full secretary. He replaces Luis Enrique Miranda Nava, who plans to run for a seat in Congress in the July 1 election.

"The appointment of Pérez Magaña demonstrates Meade's influence," Quintana noted. "He arrived at the agency at a time when the PRI presidential candidate was the head of SEDESOL ... He is a politician who likes to work in the trenches, not from a desk, and with skills that former secretary Miranda lacked."

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